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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUENOS AIRES 000036

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AR](#)  
SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: CAMPAIGN SEASON NOW OPEN

REF: A. BUENOS AIRES 01309

[1](#)B. BUENOS AIRES 02451

Classified By: Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: Former Economy Minister Roberto Lavagna announced January 4th his candidacy for the October presidential elections, but declined to comment on any political alliances he may form with opposition parties. Lavagna is the first in 2007 to announce his intention to run in the October elections, and the manner in which it was done bodes poorly for the possibility of a united opposition to challenge Kirchner in October. Lavagna's announcement comes while the Kirchner camp still appears to be seriously considering running President Kirchner's wife, Senator Cristina Kirchner de Fernandez, as their candidate for October. Corrientes province will vote on February 18 on the governor's proposal to allow reelection of the governor and the main opposition to the proposal is being led by a Presbyterian priest, raising comparisons to the October 2006 vote in Misiones on reelection, which had significant natural repercussions when voters rejected an amendment to allow the governor's reelection. END SUMMARY.

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Lavagna for President  
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[1](#)2. (C) Former Economy Minister Roberto Lavagna announced January 4th his candidacy for the October presidential elections, but declined to comment on any political alliances he may form with opposition parties. Although Lavagna has been flirting publicly with announcing his candidacy, he appears to have surprised leading center-right opposition leader Mauricio Macri with his announcement. Macri has not yet declared his official candidacy for 2007, but he has been quoted in the past year as saying he is ready to run for president. Macri's PRO party is still believed to be a possible political ally for Lavagna, who, in the press, asked Macri not to run against him to avoid splitting the opposition vote. The traditionally center-right party Radical Civic Union (UCR) is publicly backing Lavagna's candidacy, even though Lavagna remains silent on working with them. Although Lavagna is the first to announce his candidacy in 2007, he is not the first to throw his hat in the ring: Affirmation for an Egalitarian Republic (ARI) leader Elisa Carrio and Neuquen Governor Jorge Sobisch had announced their candidacies in 2006 and 2005 (respectively).

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Cristina Kirchner for President?  
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[1](#)3. (C) Lavagna's announcement comes while the Kirchner camp still appears to be seriously considering running President Kirchner's wife, Senator Cristina Kirchner de Fernandez, as their candidate for October. Congressman and longtime Kirchner associate Carlos Kunkel has said in press reports

that Cristina is likely to be the presidential candidate in October. Other senior GoA officials, including Cabinet Chief Fernandez, have noted that Cristina would be an "ideal candidate." According to Cabinet staffer Bruno Tomaselli, Nestor would like to spend the next four years as president of the Peronist party, strengthening and shaping it into a more structured political party. Tomaselli also said that Cristina was polling high enough to win the election in the first round, so the Kirchners are not worried about not remaining in office. The media and Tomaselli predict that the official announcement of the Kirchner candidate can be expected as early as March.

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Priest opposes reelection in Corrientes  
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¶4. (U) Corrientes province will vote on February 18 on Governor Arturo Colombi's proposal to allow reelection of the governor and the main opposition is being led by a Presbyterian priest, raising comparisons to the October 2006 vote in Misiones on reelection. Father Jose Luis Niella has announced he will be a candidate against allowing reelection of the governor in Corrientes. Niella said in the press that politicians become "distracted from their duties when they know they can be reelected, because they think more about their future candidacy than in their more urgent obligations." Corrientes currently only allows governors to serve one term in office; the governor's proposal would change the constitution to allow the governor to serve two terms through reelection.

¶5. (C) Niella has said that comparisons of him to the Catholic Bishop Pina who led the successful opposition to

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indefinite reelection in Misiones province are natural since they both have the good of the public in mind. However, the similarities end there. In Misiones, the Peronist governor had received public support from President Kirchner for his proposal to allow indefinite reelection, and the opposition was made up of a mix of opposition politicians and religious and social leaders. In Corrientes, both the Colombi and Niella are Kirchneristas: Colombi being a UCR member who aligned with Kirchner, Niella having accepted an offer to join a center-left alliance with the Kirchnerista Social Front for Victory (FSPV). Colombi has persisted with his proposal, despite Kirchner's pressure to abandon efforts to change provincial electoral laws after the defeat in Misiones. (COMMENT: The appearance of a priest to head the opposition to reelection in Corrientes seems less like a coincidence and more likely an effort to recreate the successful Misiones opposition to reelection, given that Niella was offered FSPV support for his intended campaign for agriculture reform in exchange for his efforts to help defeat the governor's proposal. END COMMENT.)

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Jujuy PJ likely to hold primaries  
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¶6. (U) Current governor of Jujuy province Eduardo Fellner has speculated in the press that the Peronist party (PJ) in Jujuy will have to hold a primary election to determine the party's October candidate for governor. Fellner, who abandoned his efforts for a third term under pressure from Kirchner, told the Argentine press that he thought the PJ in Jujuy would need to hold a primary election to identify a candidate for governor. The party had planned on running Fellner in October, but its plans to change the provincial constitution to allow for his reelection were scrapped after the defeat of indefinite reelections in Misiones in October ¶2006.

17. (C) Lavagna's apparently uncoordinated announcement that he will run for president this year bodes poorly for the possibility of a united opposition to challenge Kirchner in October. Although Macri is claiming that the announcement was not a surprise, it appears that Lavagna acted without consulting Macri or the other opposition figures. If the opposition hopes to form a strong and coherent challenge to Kirchner, it must strategically select its candidates based on their potential to win votes. Lavagna's decision seems to be based on his personal desire to hold the office of president, and not on calculated planning among the opposition parties. Early polling results from pollster Analia del Franco indicate that Lavagna is currently registering less than six percent of intended votes, a number that is likely to fluctuate as more candidacies are announced this spring.

18. (C) More and more people believe that Cristina Kirchner will be the Peronist candidate in October. According to polls, she can expect between 40 and 47 percent of the vote for president, making it easy for her to win in the first round. While the Argentine public seems accepting of the idea of another female president, political analysts feel her candidacy is a political move to extend the Kirchners' ability to maintain power. Nestor Kirchner is apparently concerned that he will be victim to the same fate as other second term presidents: one day after the election he will be a lame duck and his second term could end badly. By running Cristina, he avoids sullyng his legacy with a weak second term, but remains in the circle of power, with the possibility of reelection following his wife's term. Assuming continued economic growth and barring any major crisis, like an energy shortage, political analysts in Argentina expect an easy win for either Kirchner candidate.  
END COMMENT.

WAYNE